

Spain SC orders trial of Catalan leaders

Spain's Supreme Court yesterday ordered 18 former Catalan leaders to stand trial over their role in last year's declaration of independence. The court said nine jailed former leaders including Catalonia's ex-vice president Oriol Junqueras should be tried for rebellion, which carries a prison sentence of up to 25 years. But the region's former president Carles Puigdemont -- who played a key role in the separatist drive and is in self-imposed exile in Belgium -- is not part of the group because Spain does not allow trials in absentia. Catalonia's parliament declared independence on October 27 last year following a banned secession referendum that was marred by violence. The move triggered Spain's worst political crisis since the country returned to democracy following the death of long-time dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. Apart from Junqueras, the court ordered five other members of the Catalan government to stand trial, along with the ex-president of the Catalan parliament, Carme Forcadell. The leaders of two powerful grassroots separatist groups, Jordi Sanchez of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), and Jordi Cuixart of Omnium Cultural, were also ordered to stand trial for rebellion. Some of the accused also face charges of embezzlement or disobedience. Junqueras and the other former Catalan cabinet members were detained in November 2017 pending trial after organising the illegal referendum and declaring independence from Spain.

US parcel bomb scare spreads

De Niro, Biden latest targets as more Trump critics receive bombs; US president blames media for spreading anger in society; Democrats accuse him of inciting violence



(From top left) Actor Robert De Niro, former president Barack Obama, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and billionaire George Soros; (Bottom row, from left) former VP Joe Biden, Democratic lawmaker Debbie Schultz, former CIA director John Brennan, and California Democratic Representative Maxine Waters. PHOTO: AFP

Former US vice president Joe Biden and Hollywood megastar Robert De Niro were the latest targets yesterday of a spree of suspicious packages and pipe bombs sent to opponents of Donald Trump as the US president lashed out at the media for stirring up "anger." Political foes of the Republican commander-in-chief accused him of inciting violence after pipe bombs were sent to Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, CNN and other figures who are loathed by Trump supporters. With midterm elections less than two weeks away, the president reacted first by calling for unity, but then reverting to attacking the media, which he stepped up early Thursday. "A very big part of the Anger we see today in our society is caused by the purposely false and inaccurate reporting of the Mainstream Media that I refer to as Fake News," Trump tweeted. "It has gotten so bad and hateful that it is beyond description. Mainstream Media must clean up its act, FAST!" The spree began Monday with a device found at the New York home of billionaire liberal donor George Soros. The FBI said a total of seven suspicious packages were sent in New York, Washington and Florida, including to Obama's attorney general Eric Holder and two to Maxine Waters, a California lawmaker. Yesterday, a New York police

bomb squad removed a similar looking package sent to De Niro at the TriBeCa Productions company he co-founded, sending it for analysis. In June, 75-year-old De Niro received a standing ovation at the Tony Awards in New York for using an expletive to condemn Trump. During the 2016 campaign, the actor slammed the Republican as "blatantly stupid." CNN evacuated its New York bureau after a pipe bomb was found in the mailroom together with an envelope containing white powder. The FBI, US Secret Service and local police have mounted a full-scale criminal investigation, appealing to members of the public to come forward with any information they may have. Liberal and left-wing critics accuse Trump's rhetoric-laden "Make America Great Again" presidency of emboldening right-wing extremists.

WHAT WAS IN THE PACKAGES?

The packages were all similar and contained "potentially destructive devices," according to FBI. The packages were sent in manila envelopes with bubble wrap, marked with computer-printed address labels. Each listed Debbie Wasserman Schultz, former chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee, as the sender, including misspellings of her last name, the FBI said. The devices inside, according to reports and a photograph of one, were small, crude but potentially lethal pipe bombs: usually a metal water pipe filled with explosive material and shrapnel, tightly sealed at the ends and detonated by a fuse inserted through a hole. O'Neill said that package also contained an envelope of an unidentified white powder.



Honduran migrants heading in a caravan to the US, travel on foot and atop vehicles in Mapastepec on their way to Pijijiapan Chiapas state, Mexico, yesterday. Inset, Families rest roadside while traveling with the caravan. The US military has received a request from the Department of Homeland Security for active-duty troops on the US-Mexico border, a US official said yesterday, after President Donald Trump said he was "bringing out the military" to guard against a caravan of Central American migrants trekking through Mexico.

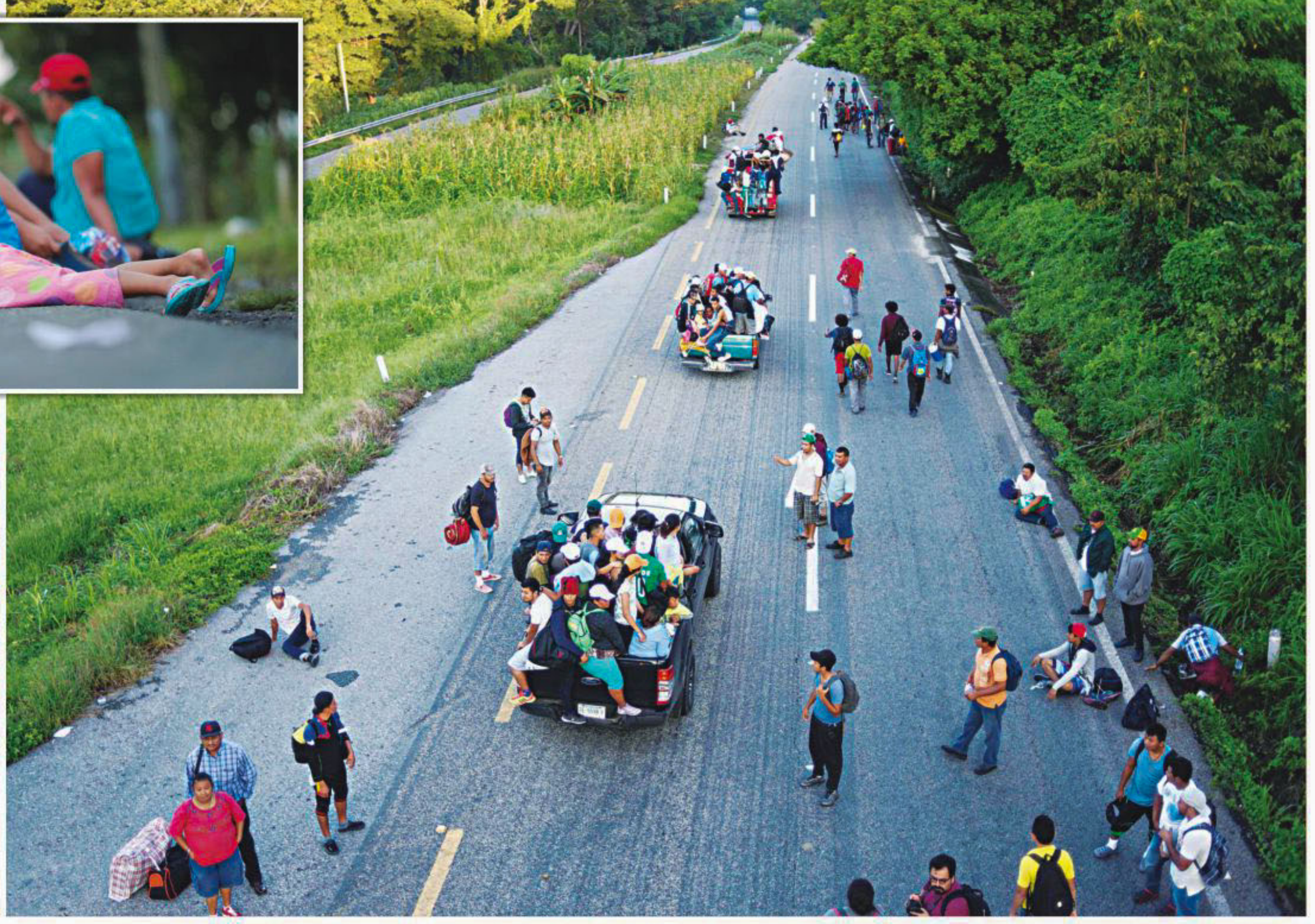


PHOTO: AFP, REUTERS

David vs Goliath 'Iconic' image of Palestinian protester in Gaza goes viral

AL JAZEERA ONLINE

An image of a shirtless young protester in Gaza gripping a Palestinian flag with one hand and swinging a slingshot over his head with the other has drawn comparisons with paintings depicting the French Revolution and the story of David vs Goliath. Captured on October 22 by Mustafa Hassouna of Turkey's Anadolu Agency, the photo shows 20-year-old Palestinian A'ed Abu Amro seeming to rise out of the thick of a protest against the Israeli blockade. He appears in sharp contrast to fellow demonstrators and reporters in protective jackets behind him, all set against a background of black smoke from burning tyres. The image has been tweeted over 5,000 times. Abu Amro lives in the al-Zaytoun neighbourhood in Gaza City. "I was surprised this picture of me went viral," he told Al Jazeera. "I participate in protests on a weekly basis, sometimes more. I didn't even know there was a photographer near me." Amro said that his friends sent him the image - taken in Beit Lahiya in northern Gaza - the next day, having spotted it being shared on social media. "I don't go to protests to get pictures of me taken, but this has encouraged me to continue demonstrating," he said. "The flag I was carrying is the same one I always hold in all the other protests I've attended. My friends make fun of me, saying it is easier to throw rocks without holding a flag in the other hand, but I got used to it." "If I get killed, I want to be buried in the same flag. We are demanding our right of return, and protesting for our dignity and the dignity of our future generation."



Yousef Munayyer, a Palestinian-American writer and political analyst based in Washington, DC, shared the photo writing: "When a Michelangelo with a camera captures David fighting Goliath in action." The story of David and Goliath is most often quoted as an analogy used to illustrate a perceived underdog overcoming a challenger or foe considered much stronger and more likely to win. "... What an image! "13th attempt to break the Gaza blockade by sea", Laleh Khalili, a SOAS University professor, tweeted. She followed it up with a second tweet containing an image of Liberty Leading the People, painted by Eugene Delacroix commemorating the July Revolution of 1830, which toppled King Charles X of France. In that iconic painting, a woman symbolising Liberty leads people over a barricade and dead bodies of the fallen, holding the Tricolore - the flag of the French Revolution, which became France's flag. MORE ON PAGE 20

New arms race is on the way

Says Putin, warns Russia will target European countries that host US missiles

AGENCIES

President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia would be forced to target any European countries that agreed to host US nuclear missiles following Washington's withdrawal from a landmark Cold War-era arms control treaty. Speaking at a news conference after holding talks with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Putin said he wanted to discuss what he called dangerous US plans to leave the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with US President Donald Trump. The two leaders are expected to hold talks in Paris on Nov 11. Putin said he feared the world might be about to slip into an arms race, saying the fate of another US-Russian arms control treaty - the new START pact - which governs strategic nuclear missile launchers and is due to expire in 2021, was also unclear. "If all this is dismantled, then nothing will be left when it comes to limiting the increase in arms," said Putin. "And then the situation will be, in my view, extremely dangerous. All that will be

left is an arms race." Russia has called Trump's decision to quit the 1987 treaty, which eliminated both countries' land-based short- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles from Europe, dangerous. Trump has accused Russia of violating the treaty, something Moscow denies. It says Washington is the one

Putin says Trump's plan to quit nuke pact will trigger new arms race

Nato flexes muscle to Russia in largest military drill since cold war

would have to respond in kind and would do so swiftly if the United States quit the pact. "If the United States does withdraw from the INF treaty, the main question is what they will do with these (intermediate-range) missiles that will once again appear. "If they will deliver them to Europe, naturally our response will have to mirror this, and European countries that agree to host them, if things go that far, must understand that they are putting their own territory at risk of a possible counter-strike." Putin said he did not understand why it was necessary to put Europe in such danger, saying it was a situation that Russia itself wanted to avoid if possible. Amid the tensions, Nato yesterday began its largest military exercises since the end of the Cold War in Norway. Some 50,000 soldiers, 10,000 vehicles, 65 ships and 250 aircraft from 31 countries were taking part in Trident Juncture 18, which is aimed at training the Atlantic Alliance to defend a member state after an aggression. The Russian embassy in Oslo said it considered Trident Juncture an "anti-Russian" exercise.

Sakharov prize awarded to jailed Ukrainian

The European Parliament yesterday awarded the prestigious Sakharov human rights prize to jailed Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, Russia's most famous prisoner, the assembly's political groups said. Sentsov was among three finalists for the prize, along with a group of 11 charities rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean and Nasser Zefzafi, head of a Moroccan protest movement who has been in jail since May 2017. Sentsov, a vocal critic of the Kremlin, is serving a 20-year term over an alleged arson plot in Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The 42-year-old is being held in a Russian penal colony above the Arctic circle.

Sarkozy should face trial: court

A French appeals court yesterday ruled that former president Nicolas Sarkozy should stand trial on charges of illicit financing of his failed 2012 presidential campaign. Sarkozy, 63, will appeal the decision before the Cour de Cassation, France's court of final appeal, his lawyers said yesterday. Prosecutors claim Sarkozy spent nearly 43 million euros (\$51 million) on his lavish re-election bid -- almost double the legal limit of 22.5 million euros -- via fake invoices.

Sir Green named in UK #MeToo

British fashion industry billionaire Philip Green was named by a member of the House of Lords yesterday as the businessman who used an injunction to suppress the publication of sexual harassment allegations by five employees. On Tuesday, the Telegraph ran an article accusing an unnamed businessman of racial and sexual abuse of staff. A legal injunction prevented the Telegraph from publishing his identity. SOURCE: AFP

YEMEN WAR

Saudi-led raid kills 16 civilians in Hodeidah

REUTERS, Dubai

At least 16 people were killed on Wednesday in an air strike that hit a factory for vegetable packaging in Yemen's Hodeidah province, medical workers and residents said. A Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen's war in 2015 has conducted frequent air strikes targeting the Iran-aligned Houthi group and has often hit civilians, although it denies doing so intentionally. Medics and residents in Bayt al-Faqih, a town 70 km (40 miles) south of Hodeidah city, said twelve people were also wounded. They said bombs fell on a vegetable packaging factory in aal-Masoudi neighborhood and the victims were workers there. Houthi media said 19 were killed and 10 were wounded in the same area. A spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition, Colonel Turki al-Malki, said the alliance is investigating the incident. The Yemen war has killed more than 10,000 people, displaced more than 2 million and driven the country, already the poorest on the Arabian Peninsula, to the verge of widespread famine.

China, Russia listen to Trump cellphone calls

Reports NYT; Beijing, Moscow laugh off allegation

REPORTERS, Washington

Chinese spies often eavesdrop on President Donald Trump when he uses his unsecured cellphone to gossip with old friends, and Beijing uses what it learns to try to sway US policy, the New York Times reported on Wednesday, citing current and former US officials. Trump's aides have repeatedly warned him that his cellphone calls are not secure and that Russian spies routinely eavesdrop on the conversations, but they say the president still refuses to give up his cellular phones, the Times reported. The officials said US spy agencies had learned from people in foreign governments and by intercepting communications from foreign officials that China and Russia were listening to the president's calls. The White House did not immediately respond to requests for comment about the

Times report. China has a sophisticated approach toward the intercepted calls and is seeking to use them to determine what Trump thinks, whom he listens to and how best to sway him, the Times reported, cited the officials. Beijing yesterday dismissed the New York Times report as "fake news" and joked the US president should switch to a Chinese phone. When asked about the report at a regular news briefing, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said "certain people in the US are sparing no efforts to win the best screenplay award at the Oscars". Russia, too, dismissed the eavesdropping allegations. "We already treat these sort of stories with a certain humour," said presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov.



Guns removed from Korean truce village

AFP, Seoul

The two Koreas were removing the last remaining firearms and guard posts yesterday from a Cold War era truce village where armed soldiers have stared each other down for decades, Seoul's defence ministry said. The Joint Security Area -- also known as the truce village of Panmunjom -- has historically been both a flashpoint and a key location for diplomacy between the two Koreas ever since their split in 1953. It is the only spot along the tense, 250-kilometre (155-mile) frontier where soldiers from North Korea and the US-led United Nations Command stand face to face. By today, all guards will be disarmed, ministry spokesman Choi Hyun-soo said, part of a recent diplomatic thaw between the two foes that has gathered pace. Panmunjom was where the armistice that ended the bitter Korean War was signed. Once demilitarised, the JSA will be guarded by 35 unarmed personnel from each side and "freedom of movement" will be allowed for visitors and tourists, according to a military pact signed between the two Koreas last month.